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Health Department Advises Protection Against Mosquito-Borne Viruses

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has identified that the recent hot, dry weather along with historical patterns of mosquito-borne disease poses an increased risk of mosquito-borne virus. As a result, MDPH has elevated the risk level for West Nile Virus from Low to Moderate.

Public health surveillance is done for mosquito-borne viruses – viruses that are carried and spread by mosquitoes. These viruses include West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).

Mosquitoes get WNV and EEE by biting infected birds. People and animals can get these diseases by being bitten by an infected mosquito. There is no evidence that a person can get these viruses from handling live or dead infected birds or animals. However, gloves should be worn when handling any dead animals, and double plastic bags should be used to discard them in the trash.

While both diseases may cause encephalitis or swelling of the brain, most people bitten by mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus will experience no symptoms or very mild symptoms and will recover on their own. People over 50 years of age have the highest risk of severe WNV disease. People who are bitten by mosquitoes carrying EEE tend to experience more severe symptoms. Severe symptoms of both diseases include high fever, muscle weakness, headache, disorientation, neck stiffness, paralysis, coma, tremors, convulsions and sometimes death. There is currently no vaccine or medical cure for these illnesses. In severe cases, intensive medical therapy can be administered in hospitals.

What is Watertown doing to protect you?

The Watertown Health Department is involved in active surveillance for mosquito-borne viruses. Please note that dead bird reports are no longer collected by MDPH and dead birds are no longer tested for WNV, as MDPH has determined that tracking and testing of dead birds is not a useful way to monitor WNV activity. Mosquito collecting and testing, which provide a more reliable indication of current WNV activity, began in early July.

Larvicide has been applied to all catch basins to prevent hatching of new mosquitoes.

Mosquito traps have been established and mosquito batches are being tested for the virus.

For more information about mosquito control, visit the East Middlesex Mosquito Control Project website at <http://sudbury.ma.us/departments/emmcp/>

Mosquito-borne virus information is on the MDPH website, at

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/id/epidemiology/providers/public-health-cdc-arbovirus-info.html>.

Spraying to kill mosquitoes may be done, only if necessary, and if recommended by the State. Every effort will be made to notify residents before spraying if this needs to be done.

What can you do to protect yourself?

Avoid exposure to mosquitoes! Be aware of increased mosquito activity between dusk and dawn. If you must be outdoors when mosquitoes are active, wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and socks. Cover baby carriages and playpens that are outdoors with mosquito netting.

Use a mosquito repellent when outdoors! Repellents that contain DEET are the most effective, although DEET should not be used on infants. The Centers for Disease Control also recommends products which contain the chemical Picaridin, found in Cutter Advanced; or products containing the oil of lemon eucalyptus. Alternatives to DEET that can also be effective for a limited duration of one hour are: citronella; Avon Skin-So-Soft Plus; Buzz Away; neem oil; and soybean oil. If you need help selecting a repellent, one useful tool is available at <http://pi.ace.orst.edu/repellents/>.

Avoid areas that tend to have a lot of mosquitoes, such as wetlands or swampy areas.

Fix holes in window and door screens.

Remove standing or stagnant water in your yard where mosquitoes breed. Check containers, pots, garbage cans, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, old tires, clogged gutters, etc.

Repair leaking pipes and outdoor faucets.

Keep your grass cut short and bushes near your house trimmed so that mosquitoes can't hide.

For further information or to report stagnant water (more than 10 days) or other complaints, please contact the Watertown Health Department at 617-972-6446.

7/30/15